How to explain a picture?

Methodological clues in art history in the epoch of Ernst H. Gombrich

At the turn of the twentieth century, art history found itself caught between two areas of science that had been distinguished theoretically by Wilhelm Dilthey: the natural sciences, defined by the domain of nature and the method based on providing causal explanations of these phenomena from the perspective of general laws, and the human sciences, defined by the domain of the human spirit and its creations, which as works of the mind and spiritual phenomena are intelligible in essence because in their form they carry meanings and express senses. Owing to the intelligibility of manifestations of the spirit, understanding took the place of explanation as the basis for methodologically elaborate, structural interpretation. Such a division of the sciences placed art history in a problematic and ambivalent position in relation to works of the past, which seemed incomprehensible due to their having lost their connection with their source context. The hermeneutical problem of incomprehensibility manifested itself as a loss of meaning, which initially had to be connected with each work of art, but which was lost due to the works' historical distance from their mental sources. In this situation, art history sought a way to move from the field of hermeneutics to the field of explanations leading from a work of art as a created effect to the causes, intentions and motives hidden behind it and which resulted from the artist's actions. On the one hand, the natural sciences offered an explanatory model based on the principles of causal logic, methodological objectivity and empiricism. On the other, the psychological factor, connected with the hidden intentions and motives for individual achievements in particular circumstances, brought the "riddle" of an unexplained work of art closer to the model of a detective mystery. A suggestive pattern for solving this kind of riddle was created from the investigative methods employed by the detective novel protagonists Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot, whose methods consisted in the meticulous collection of clues and logical discipline in making inferences.

This book puts forward a methodical synthesis of art history's aspirations to attain the status of a science capable of explaining a work of visual art in a methodical and objective way, in line with the requirements of "scientificness". Ever

since Dilthey defined the field of humanities with reference to the model of science related with natural science, distinguished art historians have sought to bolster the position of their discipline among these sciences by basing it on rigorous scientific objectivity and empiricism, accuracy and correctness, verifiability and cognitive certainty, which were still set by the natural sciences. For art historians investigating the lost sense of paintings, the main methodological problems centred on the following issues: Can an interpretation approach the explanatory model and if so, how? How can it offer a historical explanation of painted works, should it be grounded on a certain ground of facts and on the logic of conclusions, and what research methodology can ensure the correctness of explanations, verifiability and truthfulness of the results? Problems of this kind have taxed many scholars, among whom Ernst Gombrich has played a special role, first as an advocate of the turn in iconology towards Popperian deductive reasoning, and then as an inspiration and point of reference for the next generation of academics. Some of these scholars have taken the path of rigorous normative methodology, while others have sought alternatives to it or developed a narrativist methodology.

The book presents the essential links connecting methodologically oriented art history with various concepts of general methodology and the philosophy of science, as well as with the model of reasoning employed by detective novel investigators. Therefore, it does not present an overview of the discipline's methods as such, but analyses them in-depth from the point of view of the methodological background. In this background, one can discern significant interdependencies between general painting theories, methods related with them and particular beliefs and concepts from the philosophy of science or theory of scientific knowledge. This relation serves to bring out the problematic and questionable treatments made in two successive stages of transposition: 1) translating methodological views into methodological prescriptions of "how to explain the picture", 2) translating methodological prescriptions into the practice of explaining particular works.

The book's introduction makes reference to Karl Popper's remarks from *The Poverty of Historicism* and takes up the principle fundamental to a methodological explanation of pictures, namely the circular relationship between the adopted theory of the picture, the method based on it, the facts that are established, which are taken as the premises for inferences, and the results of those inferences. Explaining pictures is always connected with interpretation in that it starts out from a general theory of the picture, which in some way determines and therefore interprets what is relevant to each picture. The explanation process is governed by the logic of concepts resulting from the general, interpretative theory and revolves around such statements and such a way of establishing of facts, premises and conclusions that are subject to evaluation as to their truth or falsity only within its own logic. Any methodically and logically correct explanation of the picture can merely confirm the truth of the theory's initial interpretation, while it and the method integrated with it remain beyond the reach of verifiability.

Chapter One examines the conceptual premises for explaining artistic images related to the key notion of the work of art, which points to the creative act and the

artist's agency. The state of separation of a work of art from its source – the creator, their intentions and motivations – has been interpreted by scientific art history as something that should be counteracted and that the lost affiliation of a picture to the sphere of authorial intentions should be restituted in the form of knowledge, connecting it back to the artist and his world as a genetic context. Since the specificity of such a "restitutive" approach in art history to the works of painting was brilliantly highlighted by Jacques Derrida when analysing Meyer Schapiro's polemical response to Martin Heidegger's remarks on van Gogh's painting *The Old Shoes with Laces*, the discussion here follows this line. Schapiro's seemingly deductive, quasi-detective argument about whom the shoes in the painting actually belong to is a good example of the circular relationship that in texts that explain painted works picture theory is linked with the way facts are determined, the conclusions drawn from those facts, argumentative rhetoric, and interpretation. The text expresses the author's conviction that he has uncovered the relationship of the work under consideration to its historical background, thus rendering the painting intelligible once more. Depending on how the researcher understands it, he constructs his argument, thus making it an interpretation of the author's theory about the historical meaning of the painting being explained. At the same time, the text has an overarching rhetorical function: using the language of scientific argumentation based on a sequence of inferences, it seeks to convince that the picture finds a correct and logical explanation in it. From the source data that could be associated in one way or another with the picture being explained, those data most useful to its construction are selected to assume the role of factual premises for the purposes of developing the argument. Facts are a form of conceptualizing data in such a way that, as premises, they convincingly lead to conclusions convergent with the direction of the reasoning determined by the interpretative concept that is adopted. Facts and conclusions are defined in order that they all together consistently point in the direction implied by this concept. By means of their orientation and the role they play as clues, factual premises and the conclusions based on them become arguments, that is, statements that unequivocally support a particular thesis. A text on the historical explanation of a painting thus takes the form of a sequence of inferences for the purpose of persuasion, with this sequence determined by the internal, closed logic of the whole interpretation. Referring to Schapiro's question of how projection participates in seeing the picture, and on the other hand, to Heidegger's idea of the work of art as a form of "making visible", Derrida emphasized the irrefutably interpretative character of seeing, which prevents cognitive insight into "pure" picture data, into "visible immediacy" as something that the picture itself "actually" presents. Following Heidegger's line of argument, the optics typical of art history, focused on the continuity of the picture with the world of ordinary experience, was contrasted by the researcher with the optics oriented towards the impassable separateness of the pictorial work as a condition for the presentation of the world beyond the ordinary order of things, which can neither be reduced to realities external to the picture, nor tied to the historical world of its creator. This second kind of optics distinguishes the hermeneutic current of picture interpretation from the current of "restitutionally" oriented explanations.

Heidegger's thesis is that a work of art, by revealing the world on its own terms, breaks with the order of daily experience. This view contrasted with that of Dilthey, who asserted that understanding all products of culture is only possible to the extent that this is connected with daily lived experience as the basis for anything at all being intelligible. Dilthey also stated that a single work cannot be comprehended from the perspective of its uniqueness, characteristics which are individual, unique and non-reducible to something known from elsewhere; on the contrary, in fact, it is only to be comprehended from the point of view of what connects it with everything, which is to be understood analogically, on the same basis of lived experience.

Chapter Two presents the route for induction that Dilthey prescribes for the human sciences from the individual's lived experience, through the experience of the cultural community founded on various forms of expression and communication, through to the unity of the objective spirit of particular epochs of cultural history as the methodological foundation of art history in the first half of the 20th century. The key role fell to focusing attention mainly on structural relations connecting the multitude of individual works of art, beyond particular differences, with a general type of unity in which the objective spirit is expressed, and which constitutes an overarching entirety. First, Dilthey's ex-student, Heinrich Wölfflin, used this model of induction from part to whole as the basis for his concept of structural style in a work of art and his typology of art stylistics. Taking as his starting point Giovanni Morelli's attributive method, which distinguishes particular characteristics of individual styles from among those typical for and common to the style of a given group of artists, Wölfflin took the opposite route in order to identify those most general features of style that express the objective spirit of an epoch. Thus his method of stylistic analysis represents the paradigm in inference defined by Carlo Ginzburg as indicatory, which in essence relies on induction from numerous traces (the stylistic features of particular works) by connecting them at the level of general analogy, common and typical characteristics into a unity of hidden causes underlying them. This indicatory paradigm, which Ginzburg regarded as fixed and inherent to the historical sciences, set out a path of inductive reduction of individual facts about a picture and its context to a function of converging clues common to them all and then showing that all these clues lead harmoniously to one specific conclusion about the factors which explain the picture. However, this model offered no method for resolving questions in cases where alternative conclusions were derived in accordance with it.

Although unsolved by Wölfflin, the problem of separating the area of visual arts from the cultural whole through style categories specific only to them did find its solution in Erwin Panofsky's iconology. The iconological method sought to reveal the relationship of meaning expressed by particular visual works with the intrinsic meaning common to all cultural products, in which the objective spirit of a particular epoch was expressed. At the same time, this method defined the interpretation process as the road from induction to what connected the motifs in the picture with the sphere of lived experience (primary subject matter), through that which connects it with the general iconological type and meanings defined in literary sources (secondary subject matter), to what links all works of art, literature and philosophy

in the most general sense possible (internal subject matter). However, iconology introduced a significant change in what Dilthey described as the relation of expression as an internalisation of what is expressed (internalised side) in the external form. The structural connectivity of the two sides was replaced by its dichotomy, counterposing the external side and behind it the internal system of representation and meaning. Panofsky (and earlier Warburg) sees this relation as taking on the character of a pictorial puzzle, yet the iconological method served to solve such riddles and to reveal layers of meaning hidden behind representational motifs. As internal conformance in the meaning of each work of art with the objective spirit of the cultural totality is a foregone conclusion, in practice, what became iconology's main problem was the inductive method being applied in order to uncover iconographic intentions and symbolic intentions hidden behind the "objects and events" depicted in pictures. The significant faults and deficits of this method were vividly revealed by the controversy that played out between Panofsky and Walter Friedlaender over the iconography of Titian's painting *Sacred and Profane Love*.

However, Karl Popper, the author of *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* and *The Poverty of Historicism*, had earlier provided a methodological discrediting of the basis of Panofsky's iconology, defined through Diltheyan inductionism and historicism. He excluded from the realm of scientific claims any hypotheses remaining in the realm of conjecture, dependent on subjective psychological factors and perceptual experiences, and hypotheses unfalsifiable on the basis of a simple statement of the facts. Popper contrasted historicism and inductionism with the possibility of historical explanation in the human and social sciences which would correspond to the deductive principles in experimental sciences. In order to explain a given event or historical achievement, it is necessary to draw it deductively out of particular causal situations and not general tendencies defining the character of the epoch. The correct method is an analysis based on the principle of "situational logic": we should assume rational human actions, which derive from an appreciation of the circumstances that are encountered and aim at achieving a particular objective in given circumstances. Adopting this thesis allows a work of art to be regarded as the logical consequence of contextual premises of its creation. In Popper's view, on the common ground of "methodological individualism", which consitutes the remedy against "methodological essentialism" and historicism, the truly scientific fundamental "unity of methods", namely hypothetical-deductive reasoning, can and should connect explanatory procedures in the historical, social and life sciences.

Chapter Three of the book focuses on Gombrich's methodological project, which sought to set iconology on the tracks of contextualism and Popperian deductivism. The basis of his position was his acknowledging the ambiguity of pictorial representations and the irremovable dependence of their readings on interpretative projections, to which, in accordance with the laws of psychology, visual perception is subjected. Gombrich believed that we should not rely on our impressions gained from observing a picture, as there is no guarantee of these being based soundly on "observable data" or "visual facts"; rather, they are deceptive and allow us to find various meanings projected onto motifs and forms. If interpretative hypotheses are

to meet the criterion of falsifiability through logical recourse to the sphere of intersubjectively corroborated facts and certainties that are extrinsic to psychology, such a falsifying role must be played not by picture data but solely by contextual data. An interpretation of a picture must therefore remain in maximally close logical concordance with what various types of document deem to be unquestionable historical facts, which allows us to conclude in which circumstances, on what basis and to what end, on whose initiative and for whom an interpreted picture was created. Since the projection mechanism cannot be excluded when reading a picture, its interpreter must be guided by the very same mechanism in line with the conclusions suggested by identifying the historical context. The hypothetical framework projected onto the picture should be determined by a concrete situation which can be reconstructed to a lesser or greater extent, which justifies a certain symbolic program and iconographic idea of the picture, connected with the role it was to fulfill.

An attempt to put the premises of situational analysis into practice came in Gombrich's 1945 article on interpretations of Botticelli's mythological paintings. Based on the new iconology, this article set out a new methodical paradigm, whose essence was to confirm hypotheses relating to the content and symbolism of pictures through logical constructions connecting them to facts derived from source documents and establishing the context of the works' origins, purposes and function. The Popperian postulate of contrasting existing interpretations with alternative theories and subjecting them to rigorous falfisification tests (tests on their relation to the established facts) was turned into a practice of relating intepretations to sources, to which the factual contextual background of a painting could be traced, and arguing that the interpretational hypotheses are consistent with this context. The principle of deductively eliminating false hypotheses on the basis of statements that confirm facts took hold in art history as the principle for rejecting the views of other scholars, yet at the same time, the rule of protecting new interpretative propositions against accusations of their being inconsistent with the factual basis became the inductive addition of arguments referring to this base and confirming the hypothesis being put forward. Gombrich's article was an exemplary illustration of such an implementation of the assumptions of hypotheticalism in interpretative practice, and it is difficult to underestimate his role in shaping the model for constructing contextual explanations of pictures, which was disseminated and over subsequent decades combined various texts by numerous scholars often polemically opposed to each other.

Analysing in psychological terms the distinction that is fundamental for iconology between the representational and symbolic functions of a picture, Gombrich concluded that both are in fact reduced to one basic and primary function, namely that of substitution and transference, closely related to the mechanism of projection. In his essay *Meditations on a Hobby Horse or the Roots of Artistic Form* (1951), which represented the first outline of his famous book *Art and Illusion*, he stated that anything can become an image or a symbol when it is perceived as a possible substitute for something else, not due to the similarity of appearance, but because of the function sought and assigned to that particular thing. On this principle, depending on a child's current needs and imagination during a game, not only a stick can be-

come an image and symbol of a horse, a scepter or a sword. This essentially identical projection mechanism can also explain how the function of different symbols, and consequently, different symbolic meanings, are attributed to pictorial motifs, insofar as these are sought in terms of the adopted interpretative hypothesis. In view of the above, the rules of correct interpretation can be defined only if, as the starting point, one assumes a theoretically infinite multiplicity of possible hypotheses regarding the meaning of the picture being interpreted, and then establishes certain criteria for the falsification and elimination of such hypotheses.

Gombrich regarded analysing the practice of how a picture functions as his basic criterion in choosing the right interpretative clues among false ones. He maintained that the character and meaning of artistic images is determined to a decisive extent by their social, communicative function, which explains the conventionality of pictorial representations, both at the level of the form of their presentation and the symbolism of particular content. Like verbal language, representative art is founded on conventions, representational patterns and symbolism, which play the role of codes for conveying meanings and ensuring the communicativeness of pictures within a given cultural community. Gombrich expounded on this thesis most fully in his book *Art and Illusion* (1960). The communication model he assumed ascribed the function of a medium of intentional meaning to the picture, yet the research goal was to reveal the meaning through eliminating alternative suppositions. In the introduction to *Symbolic Images* (1972), Gombrich compared a thus defined interpretative enquiry to the work of a detective, and as his methodological model for the detective process he took the guidelines established by Eric D. Hirsch in his book *Validity in Interpretation*, referring to the Popperian logic of falsificationism. Gombrich's article *The Evidence of Images* (1969) includes examples of the practical application of the rule of deductive iconology with the aim of falsifying hypotheses about the intentional meaning of images. These were intended to convey the unreliability of interpretations based on visual impressions, which are subject to the projection illusion, and thus the need to reduce the role of perceptions to the level of subject identification as the iconographic basis of the image. According to Gombrich, from this basis it was necessary to deduce the literary source that constituted the proper contextual reference for which the painting was intended as a substitute, and then from this context it was necessary to deduce the intentional meaning of the motifs in the painting. However, Gombrich committed the basic error of confusing the unambiguity of simple linguistic statements and terms with the presumed unity of meaning of texts, and by taking this meaning to be an objective fact that makes it possible to falsify interpretations of images based on a given text. The consequence of Gombrich's position was iconographic reductionism – considering as irrelevant, non-relevant and insignificant all the components and motifs of a painting for which the picture was unable to find an explanation in the literary source.

The extreme iconographic reductionism achieved by Gombrich, who wanted to minimize the role of visual premises in interpreting paintings, was a unique phenomenon in art history, and did not convince other scholars. Mainstream iconology evolved in the opposite direction. The effects of the formal depiction of "things and

events" were seen as significant for interpreting the motifs of a painting, and for this reason, observations about them gained a prominent place among the arguments designed to support interpretive theses. At the same time, they were accorded the role of statements of fact identical with the plain, eye-witnessed truth. Rather than discrediting observational data due to their dependence on projection and subjective interpretation, as Gombrich wished, scholars were inclined to grant them objective status, and to recognize in them the products of the artist's intentional actions aimed at inscribing meaning into the structure of the picture itself. Such a view led to the conclusion that interpretation should explain the visual structure as being thoughtfully, purposefully and sensibly organised, creating "a habitat of meanings", a place where they are located and hidden, but also discreetly shown. The idea of "disguised symbolizm" gave rise to the direction of interpretation put forward by Erwin Panofsky in his book *Early Netherlandish Painting* (1953). Lotte Brand Philip adapted it to a symbolic reading of Bosch's *Adoration of the Magi*, which Gombrich opposed.

A superb example of interpretation based on an analysis of compositional structure is Leo Steinberg's article from 1973 *Leonardo's Last Supper*. He contested all the methodological conclusions reached by Gombrich, starting from the thesis that the source text should be taken as the basis for interpretation, and at the same time as the deductive key to resolving interpretative problems. Contrary to the claim that identifying a literary source should guarantee the unambiguity of a picture that acts as an iconographic substitute for the text, Steinberg showed how wide an area of ambiguity may be masked by such a link, even if it is created by the most seemingly self-evident iconography. In his opinion, the conviction that Leonardo wished to depict the theme of the *Last Suppe*r on the basis of the biblical description does not resolve and close the matter of interpretation; on the contrary, it opens it up, prompting the question to what extent the artist covered the chosen theme and the source text with his painting: "How much did Leonardo depict in The Last Supper?" The answer is only to be found in the painting, in what it depicts when juxtaposed with the literary source. Thus the iconographic identification of the subject and the literary basis still does not clarify the picture in any way, as individual images dealing with the same iconography must be explained as individual forms of visual translation and interpretation of the relevant text. What Steinberg's analysis clearly revealed, however, was the uncertainty about the relationship between his proposed symbolic reading of the compositional structure of Leonardo's painting and the artist's intention.

The problematic issue of referring meaningful relations that can be read at the level of the visual form of a painting to the sphere of the artist's intentions, and thus the question of the correctness and appropriateness of an interpretation in relation to the intentional plan of the work, took centre stage in two methodological approaches that were formulated in the 1980s with a view to resolving it. These approaches are considered in detail in the fourth chapter of the book. Both approaches adopted a polemical stance towards iconology, and at the level of general scientific methodology, their primary point of reference was the deductive-nomological mod-

el of explanation. Their authors, Oskar Bätschmann and Michael Baxandall, offered their own divergent responses to Carl Hempel's call for applying this model to explanations in the field of the historical sciences.

Bätschmann distinguished the sphere of the historical explanation of a work of art from the sphere of its interpretation, acknowledging that the former constitutes the domain of inferences concerning the work's place in the system of causal relations and general principles, and at the same time sets the logical basis and framework for the latter. The clear distinction between the two areas stood in opposition to Panofsky's iconology, which Bätschmann saw as wrongly marginalising the scope of interpretation, in fact subordinating it to an explanation consisting in deducing the meaning of individual works from the general principle that all works express the prevailing character of the epoch. Bätschmann resolutely opposed the reduction of historical relationships to the categories of dependence and influences, as this entailed reducing a particular work to the subordinate role of symptom and effect determined by some general rule, i.e. fully explainable by deductive inference from the given rule. He situated the reasons and motivations guiding the creator and commissioner of a work, as well as its functional purpose, in the field of causal relations as a set of factors that can be established on the basis of the sources. The facts on the subject, connected to the general principles of historical relationships, which define their explanatory role, were considered by Bätschmann as a contextual explanans for the facts found in the work itself, and as fulfilling the criterion of logical derivation from these findings, according to the deductive-nomological model. On the other hand, it is not possible to reduce to a logical dependence those relations which link an individual work of art to the general rules of art, iconography or artistic genre. The fact that a work of art is situated within a certain genre or iconographic category does not mean that it is simply subordinated to prevailing rules, but only that it must remain in a certain dialogical relationship with them, the nature of which may vary depending on the artist's creative invention.

Bätschmann's reliance on the DN model had an objective essentially opposite to that indicated by Hempel's and Popper's theses about the universality of the deductive method for all sciences and its appropriateness for producing historical explanations of all kinds of human achievements and works. The art historian appealed to the principle of logical explanation in order to prove how little one can actually explain an artistic image when using this model and how much room it leaves for interpretation, which has to go beyond the boundaries set by deductive rigour. This was also the implication of adopting a different methodological basis than the DN model for explanations concerning works of art: its deficiencies were to be effectively filled by an abductive method of reasoning. The basic message of Bätschmann's hermeneutics was that although what is incomprehensible and enigmatic in a picture, prompting the question "why?", remains beyond the reach of deductive explanation, it can be explained by methodically disciplined interpretation, or abduction. In taking abduction as the basis of his method of explaining pictures, Bätschmann referred to the book *The Sign of Three: Dupin, Holmes, Peirce* (1983), which offered an extensive presentation of the theory of abduction formulated by

Charles S. Peirce, highlighting the analogies between it and the detective methods of Auguste Dupin and Sherlock Holmes. Ginzburg's article on the indicatory paradigm was included in the collection of texts that make up the book. However, Bätschmann did not follow this interpretation of Holmes's method, but instead drew his own conclusions from the way other authors have presented its affinity with the principles of abduction. Following the analogy between Peirce's theory, Holmes's method and the art historian's research work allowed Bätschmann to stick with the detective paradigm of inquiry indicated by Gombrich on the one hand and Ginzburg on the other. At the same time, however, in relation to Ginzburg's method of the inductive combination of clues (erroneously labelled as abduction), Bätschmann's method was closer to the principles of logical discipline and verifiability. At the same time, it was in opposition to Gombrich's position, who derived from the principles of deduction a method of eliminating all readings going beyond the iconography of the painting, dictated by the source text.

Bätschmann declaratively adopted the principles of abduction, and in doing so omitted Peirce's important economic criterion of simplicity and economy, according to which hypotheses needed to be weighed up in order for the best to emerge. In his exemplary interpretation of Poussin's *Stormy Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe*, intended to demonstrate the application of the art-historical hermeneutics method, Bätschmann explained the incomprehensible and enigmatic aspects of the painting at the level of symbolism hidden in the motifs of nature, which extended the system of meanings of the representation through discrete allusions related to Bacchus. This interpretative decision raises doubts in terms of the criterion of economy, and at the same time is the result of its being replaced in Bätschmann's theory by the criterion of coherence. In accordance with this, i.e. with the requirement of coherently matching facts by means of interpretation, in view of the hypothesis adopted, Bätschmann unilaterally simplified the connections between the motifs of the painting considered as tropes of allusive references to Bacchus. The way in which these motives were descriptively identified as data in the factual picture stemmed from the meaning attributed to them at the interpretive level. Were the features of motives defined differently, they would lose their role as facts that fit the hypothesis according to the rules of abduction. There is a general dimension to this problem, as, by its very nature, the identification of pictorial facts as components to be bound by abduction must be selective. It is not possible to define conceptually all the properties of the work being explained, as Hempel rightly noted, hence if an abductive hypothesis must by definition include all the facts defining its object, this postulate applies only to the sum of those facts which, within its framework, are assumed to adequately define the object. The visible elements of the picture, motifs and their interrelationships can be described in a different way, stating facts about them that will not fit in with the proposed hypothesis or will even contradict it. However, with regard to the interpretation of Poussin's work constructed by Bätschmann, this general and fundamental methodological problem expressed itself particularly acutely.

In practice, the method of art-historical hermeneutics has shown that even the relatively wide range of contextual information available restricts the freedom to as-

cribe meanings to pictures only to a neglible degree, as it is unverifiable on the basis of objective certainties. To a much greater extent, however, referring to this resource in an argument serves to give credence to interpretations freely derived from it, except that, on the same basis, different interpretations may be proposed. The wide scope for discretion extending between source data and conclusions about the picture's intentional meaning revealed Bätschmann's tendency to look for complex semantic structures – going beyond the level of conventional iconography and including deeply hidden symbols, quotations or allusive visual references to other works – in cases in which it was possible to take, according to the theory of abductive reasoning, a simpler line of interpretation. By adopting his interpretative concept, Bätschmann defined, from this point of view, the visual premises offered by the picture and, at the same time, omitted and invalidated such pictorial factors that did not fit into this concept. If abduction means *ex definitione* the choice of the best hypothesis according to established criteria, then what the model analysis of Poussin's painting showed was rather the impossibility of making such a choice that in the light of these criteria would not be doubtful and for which there would be no equivalent, similarly uncertain alternatives.

In his book *Patterns of Intention* (1985), Baxandall identified the relationship between the causal explanation of a picture and its meaning and intention in the opposite way to Gombrich, his former research supervisor at the Warburg Institute. Not only did Baxandall separate the notion of intention from the sphere of intentional meaning and from the artist's psyche, in order to bind it as closely as possible to the visual form of the painting, he also regarded the question of meaning as being secondary and problematic, and above all, less important and less tangible than the overarching question of the causal basis of a painted work, on which, in his view, historical explanation should be focused and which can be grasped in a simple model of the artist's entirely conscious and rational actions. According to Baxandall, the primary, overarching, necessary and obvious purpose for which the pictures are created is not therefore related to the function Gombrich ascribed to them of substituting the things and events depicted, or the content contained in literary sources. On the contrary, in fact, the aim is primarily to achieve a favourable and interesting visual effect. Moreover, due to this aim, it is possible to explain in terms of paramount necessity, and at the same time, in the simplest terms, certain motifs and pictorial solutions that researchers inspired by the idea of "disguised symbolizm" have interpreted as signs dictated by a presumed symbolic intention. In Baxandall's opinion, a historical explanation was supposed to reveal the intention of the painting understood as the purposefulness of the formal solutions used in it. He proposed a simple methodological formula, which made it possible to offer a causal explanation for each painting, always assuming the same model of inference about its intention. In all cases, the assumption must be that it is the product of deliberate and rational actions in the sphere of the professional painter's craft, oriented towards a satisfactory and interesting visual effect. Regardless of the processes taking place in the artist's mind, which remain unknown, the finished picture retains a rational, and thus deductible, relationship to its purpose, the conditions in which it was produced and the resources used.

The basis of the method developed by Baxandall was the theory of objective knowledge, articulated by Popper in his 1972 book. Referring to the opinions of Robin Collingwood, as well as to his own idea of "situational logic", Popper reduced all works of human intellect to the common category of situational solutions to problems. In order to explain objectively the resulting structures of knowledge, among them works of art, it was necessary, on the basis of analysing these, to infer the causes of their being formed in a certain way. In accordance with the deductive-nomological model, the author of *Objective Knowledge* stated that a work of art finds a historical explanation when the set of sentences defining its properties in terms of the effect and the solution to the problem constitutes an explicandum, for which the set of sentences defining the problem situation, which consist of the problem and its background, constitutes an explicans, and this explicans logically entails the explicandum, just as cause entails effect. Popper considered Gombrich's way of explaining the history of illusionism, based on the thesis that illusionist painting is the result of choosing the illusion of reality as the basic aim, and consequently of solving problems resulting from such a defined aim, to be a model example of treating artistic problems from such a perspective. Baxandall, on the other hand, claimed that the essential aim of any painting is to match the expectations deriving from the specifics of its functional purpose and its location in a particular artistic context. These are variable factors that must be considered on a case-by-case basis. A painting is explained historically as a consequence of a purposeful cause, which is the intention to solve a certain painting-related problem in a way appropriate to the situation, through the adaptive utilization of the available resources.

The author of *Patterns of Intention* applied Popper's theory to the model of the explanatory triangle proposed by Rex Martin in his book *Historical Explanation* (1977). On the one hand, this was to be a form for subjecting Collingwood's idea of *re-enactment* and situational solutions to problems to the rigours of logical objectivity. On the other, it was a form of a correction to Hempel's model of historical explanation, allowing it to bypass the question of general laws and deterministic logic in the field of human action. Baxandall modified Martin's scheme by taking as the first vertex of the explanatory triangle, the equivalent of an explanandum, a descriptive statement of the picture features being explained. These features needed to be conceptualised as ways of solving pictorial problems in order to relate them to the second vertex of the triangle, designated by the categories through which these problems are defined in relation to the problem situation (*Brief*). The third vertex was the resources at the painter's disposal in solving the problems of constructing a suitable painting. Baxandall sought to develop a methodical and maximally objectified explanatory system. However, in order to enter the picture into this system of objective exploration, it was first necessary to reduce the characteristic features of its visual form to conceptual terms that in fact described not directly the given object of the explanation, but the scholar's thoughts and reflections stimulated by his impressions from the analytical viewing, while at the same time looking towards the other vertices of the conceptual triangle. Popper saw this method as being intended to free the explanation of the structures of "objective knowledge" from psycholo-

gism and subjectivism, transferring the exploratory process to the level of logical deductions. Baxandall, however, openly introduced into the method a dependence on the starting point located in the sphere of perceptual experiences, conjectures and associations of the subject of analysis. The whole construction of the exploratory triangle was founded on a verbal interpretation of these psychological processes, which was a form of defining "facts" on the side of the explanandum, and defining them in terms of being able to relate to concepts defining the *Brief* and resources. This basis could therefore not be considered objective. The issue of "actual" image data also in this case, as in Bätschmann's art-historical hermeneutics, proved to be the Achilles' heel of the proposed methodology. The in-depth cogitation in the book further exposed the doubts raised by the way in which Baxandall's theoretical theses are translated into the practice of exploring exemplary pictures. On the basis of a single pattern of the *re-enactment* triangle, and in three consecutive chapters, Baxandall built three differently oriented arguments with a different purpose and guiding theme. The overarching narrative that develops the chosen theme in relation to a selected picture revealed itself through inconsistencies and contradictions between the chapters, which by design were only meant to lay out different aspects of one clearly defined methodology using different examples.

Searching for the most appropriate way of translating the deductive-nomological model of scientific explanation into the least controversial method of historical, causal explanation of pictures possible brought the individual differences between Bätschmann's and Baxandall's positions, resulting from a different interpretation of the methodological model, into clear focus. The opposite directions of this interpretation fitted in with the previously outlined reversal of the ways of thinking about pictorial symbolism indicated by Panofsky and Gombrich, starting from iconology. The first direction led to the search for unconventional symbolic signs in a painting, masked by the appearance of mimetic naturalness and ordinary iconography. The latter direction, on the other hand, brought non-standard motifs down to the purely representational layer of the painting, and at the same time brought its symbolic level, above all unusual details, down to iconographic patterns corresponding to the basic theme of the work. While Bätschmann took the usual path of discrete symbolism, Baxandall followed Gombrich and chose the direction of iconographic reductionism. The alternative attempts undertaken by both scholars to render the explanatory rigours more precise in order to bring them as close as possible to the model of logical deduction and to establish an effective methodological prescription for explaining a painting resulted in an effect rather opposite to the one intended, for, paradoxically, they became part of the process of the pluralisation of various views on how pictures should be explained. The different methodologies relating to the DN model resulted from different assumptions concerning the intentional dimension of a painting, which was to be detected by means of inference. This object of inference was defined differently by the theory of artistic intention (Bätschmann) and the theory of picture intention (Baxandall). Both scholars were therefore in their own way repeating the error of *circulus in demonstrando* of iconology, which consists in a methodical search in concrete images for examples and proof of something

that is preconstructed at the level of a general theory of a work of art, which determines the method of its explanation.

Bätschmann and Baxandall responded polemically to the model of the image's intentionality inherent in iconology which Gombrich connected to the substitutive function of representations in relation to the things and events depicted (representational intent), in relation to the texts illustrated (iconographic intent) and the programmes symbolised (iconological intent). However, they were not the only ones that contributed to the 1980s expansion of the catalogue of alternative theories of intention to explain pictures. Other models of the intentionality of paintings also played an important role, interpreting the visual form of a subject in terms of the effect that was supposed to result from a single purposeful cause of paramount importance: it was assumed that this form was subordinated to the intentional function of directing the viewer's attention to the painting and directing how it is received. Such an assumption was made in different variations by Wolfgang Kemp, Michael Fried and Norman Bryson. A common and characteristic feature of all their theories, which is discussed in Chapter Five of the book, was the adoption of the picture as a medium of communication and dialogue between the artist and the viewer. This related to the proposition that a picture can be explained as a kind of message, and in order to do so, it must be related to the context of a communicative situation in which it mediates between its creator and the recipient. If the form of the painting from such a perspective derives causally from its role as a link between the painter and the viewer, then it does not result from a logical dependence binding the premises and the necessary consequences, but from a dialogical relation; just as in a dialogue, an action provokes a reaction, a statement made by one party prompts a response from the other, an introduction implies a response and constitutes a premise for it, but does not decide what the response will actually be. The picture is therefore a form of the sender's response to the existing external conditions of contact with the addressee and to their role as the subject of the gaze, and at the same time, it defines certain premises of the reception of the visual message. Although the three scholars mentioned above defined this communicative model in different ways, all of them made the general assumption that the right key to explaining the picture lies in the putative intention, hidden behind its visual form, to enter into dialogue with the viewer.

The basic thesis that every picture is essentially a form of a response to its beholder's gaze had the nature of a general law, more concrete than the most general law of the rationality of human actions, which is taken as the basis for the adaptation of the deductive-nomological model in the field of historical explanation, but also raising understandable objections. In this respect, by identifying the general law as the basis of the explanans, the aesthetic-receptive current in art history approximated the DN model. Yet at the same time, the scope of this law has been explicitly limited by replacing the principle of logical consequence with that of creative dialogue. From the basic general premise that every picture is shaped due to its function and the situation of the object being observed, it does not follow that it must be shaped in a particular way, but only that the picture in its visual form must relate to it in

some way, taking on the role of a response on the part of the artist. The individual nature of this response remained to be established by analysis of the viewing data in relation to the historical and situational context.

Referring in his book *Der Anteil des Betrachters* (1983) to Gombrich's thesis on the necessary and essential "beholder's share" in the production of a perceptual effect, Kemp argued that a picture is not reduced to the role of a substitute for object-event or iconographic content that is imposed on its form by the receiving subject, depending on the natural predispositions of the mind and its own projections related to one or another context. Adjusting the picture to the situation of being watched is connected not only with its function as a stimulator of the effects of visual illusion, but also with the more important function of regulating the manner, scope and point of view, and thus a particular attitude to what is seen – along with the orientation of observing the formal construction of the picture, the formal construction of the picture also directs the interpretation of its object. By opposing iconology's reducing the picture to a mere substitutive and representational function, Kemp revealed the paramount importance of its other function, a presentational one, oriented towards viewing and reception, which determines how the viewers see the subject being presented, how the picture allows them to see it and receive it. Kemp turned to the notion of the "implicit beholder" as a key category in the research method proposed under the name of "reception aesthetics", pitched against Gombrich's position, which emphasised the variability of picture views due to the projection mechanism, and against the current of reception history studies, which blurred the identity of a work in the differences between individual ways of perceiving and receiving it. Openly opposed to both the approaches to reception problems mentioned above, which subordinate the picture to the predispositions of the viewer, this method revealed its polemical objective, which was to demonstrate the irreducibility of the work to acts of reception. It sought to convince of the validity of Kemp's thesis that the balance of power between the picture and the viewer is different, and is balanced as in a partner dialogue: the former does not succumb to domination from the latter, but is a party equally active and influencing its partner, imposing its own conditions, if not even subordinating it, while realising the intention of its creator.

It was from Michael Fried that Kemp took the assumption that the "internal presentation" of a picture is oriented towards a dialogue with the position of the viewer in the space in front of it. Kemp referred directly to the book *Absorbtion and Theatricality* (1980), in which Fried clarified his own conception of the response that constitutes the manner in which a picture is resolved, in view of the fact that by its very nature, in the objective dimension, its surface turns towards the viewer – not only towards his gaze, but also towards his bodily presence *vis a vis* the work that presents him with a certain view. The American critic and theoretician of modernism adopted the physical, situational connection between the surface of the painting directed directly at the viewer and his actual position opposite, with his face to this surface and to the view presented by it, as the fundamental and primary reality for painting, and as its *sine qua non* condition, from which the visual form of the paint-

ing is inseparable and, consequently, without which paintings cannot be understood. Since every painting must from necessity refer first and foremost to this relationship, which is inscribed in the specificity of the very medium of painting, Fried considered it to be the primary premise conditioning the way the paintings are constructed above all external contexts and, at the same time, a key factor in explaining their internal structure.

Fried's individualistic position was openly and strongly opposed by Norman Bryson in his book *Tradition and Desire* (1984). He rejected Fried's thesis that French painting from the second half of the 18th century was constructed as a response to the real, bodily and situational presence of the viewer in front of the canvas, and that this response, in the formula of absorption, was constituted by endeavours aimed at invoking the suggestion of the absence of any witness to the situation depicted who could observe it from *vis a vis* the painting. For Bryson, the painterly form responds to the viewer's gaze in a completely different way, because this gaze is not directed independently, from his own place by his bodily form, but primarily by the pictorial tradition preserved in the subject's memory. A painting is therefore a response to the gaze directed from within this tradition, which sees each painting as another link in the sequence, presenting itself against the background of previous achievements. The basis for and the medium of the dialogue with the viewer is not so much the surface of the painting present in front of him as an object and transformed into a negation of objecthood but the system of recognisable pictorial conventions, performing the role of a code for the painting as a set of painterly signs. In contrast to Kemp, Bryson, like Wolfgang Iser, relied on the communicative model of the relation between the work of art and the sender and the recipient. This model was proposed by Gombrich in his book *Art and Illusion*, and assumed that in this system a set of representational schemata is equivalent to a code, while the work of art is the effect of its transformational adaptation. Bryson reinterpreted the principle of "schema and correction" on which Gombrich based his conception of the history of pictorial representation, and did so in accordance with Harold Bloom's theory of the "anxiety of influence". He adjudged that "the meaning of a painting is, always, another painting", one to which the corrective operations performed by the painter on the painterly patterns refer.

Several years passed before Bryson fundamentally changed his view on the issue of identifying the visual sources of pictures. In his article *Art in Context* (1992), he shattered the illusion that a painting could reliably remind its viewers and researchers of those patterns to which its creator actually referred in his dialogue with tradition. Bryson concluded that the patterns that art historians point to and set on the side of the causal context of paintings are in fact only the consequence of a free extrapolation of their own impressions, of perceived similarities, while the cause of these impressions is the research optics connected with the assumption that the factors influencing a work of art leave visible traces in it, and on this principle inter-image similarities are created. Because the source context is *de facto* an illusion constructed in the interpretation process and remains a product that is inseparable from it, Bryson adopted Jonathan Culler's thesis that this constructive and interpre-

tative character of the context intended to explain the picture is accurately reflected in the concept of "framing" as a causative action on the part of the interpreter. While in the system of concepts and methodological assumptions of art history the causative context is referred to as an explanans in relation to the work being explained as an explanandum, the alternative term "framing", which takes in the visual text and its contextual interpretation, brings out a feedback loop between one and the other, a vicious circle relationship unavoidable in this system. The way of seeing the picture being explained is influenced by the frame of vision adopted in the interpretation of its source, explanatory context, which is then tested on the picture to confirm that it fits and corresponds to what is seen in it.

Culler's view echoed the critique of the notion of historical context made previously by Hayden White, the author of *Metahistory*. White believed that the scientific discourse of history, in which the past is presented, is a form of the contextual interpretation of past events, achievements or works based on its own conventions and within these conventions that produces an "explanatory affect". White based his thesis of the crucial role of representational schemas in historiography on Gombrich's claims in his book *Art and Illusion*, while the theory of narrativism associated with this thesis defined the special and distinct character of methods of historical explanation of works of the past in relation to the DN model, based on the opposition between the explanandum and explanans. According to White, explanatory schemas in the representation of historical reality play a role corresponding to that of schemas in the representation of the visible world. Projected by the scholar onto the "historical field", in which information resources drawn from various sources can be set, these schemas organise his or her "mental perception" and allow the creation of an image giving the elements of this resource the form of recognisable and understandable figures – such figures are facts. They constitute the basic components of the historical field and are adapted to the construction of explanatory and narrative relations between them. The way in which individual historical facts are encoded, conceptualised and saturated with meaning depends on the ideas about the world of the past that the historian forms when assembling the available sources. On the basis of the same sources, it is possible to construct very different pictures and to define facts from their point of view in different ways, all depending on the direction taken by the historian's imagination in interpreting the source material. A historical fact is thus a figure of interpretation, both in the sense of a painterly metaphor and in the general rhetorical sense. For this reason, phenomena from history cannot be explained according to the principles of scientific explanation adopted in the natural or exact sciences, which refer to the objectivity of the facts ascertained and to purely logical relations between them. Historical phenomena can only be interpreted because they are the products of a certain way of understanding and interpreting source accounts, giving them a certain meaning in relation to the overall picture of the past, while the particular facts stated are precisely figures that serve to present a reliable and meaningful picture of it.

The narrativist approach to the field of historical explanations argued for the inalienable primacy of the principles of rhetoric, on which the interpretive determi-

nation of individual facts and their relations is always based, over the principles of the logic of inferences, which are already built within the field of factography thus determined. This approach had significant methodological implications. If the logic of historical deduction is subordinated to the rhetoric of determining and narratively binding facts, methodology cannot stop at the level of analysing the relationship between factual premises and conclusions, but must move to a higher level, that is, to place itself in the sphere of analysing the rhetorical and narrative operations that organize the explanatory discourse in advance. Narrativism, as a perspective for research focused in this way, acts as a narrativist methodology suited to the specificities of historical science.

In his book *Principles of Art History Writing* (1991), David Carrier referred directly to both Gombrich's idea of the conventionality of representation and White's narrativism based on it. He defined scientific art history as a special genre of creative writing about art (*artwriting*), freely founded on its own genre conventions and on a factual basis, whose essence is the credible representation of works of art in relation to their historical context, and this credibility is based on the effect of conformity to the facts about the work and about the context. Following Gombrich and White, Carrier rejected the idea of the veracity of representations, and with it the "humanist" idea of the compatibility of a contextual explanation of a work of art with the truth about its creator's intention. The question of concordance with the facts comes down to concordance with how they are determined on the basis of pictorial and source data, which is not dictated by the data themselves, but which depends on the accepted conventions of discursive framing and the combination of facts in the argumentative argument. In turn, these conventions are employed in accordance with the interpretative direction chosen by individual authors in order to base it credibly on a factual basis. The result of this is different accounts of the work's relationship to its context, contructed according to the same rules of a coherent and close association between pictorial and contextual facts, and consequently they do not reveal the truth about the artist's intention. It is rather that case that these different, individualised representations are testimonies to the original interpretative ideas and disctinctive style of particular scholars.

In comparing the history of the explanatory representation of pictures to the history of painterly illusionism from Gombrich's perspective, however, Carrier went further than White, whose theses he took as his starting point. The principle of "schema and correction" suggested that behind the overt aim of humanist art history writing, which is to meet the criteria of objectivity and legitimacy perfectly by explaining a given work and detecting the true intention of the creator in a way that is definitive, indisputable and closes the discussion, there is another aim, one dictated by the ambition to challenge previous findings and explain the painting in a new and as original a way as possible, to shatter the patterns of existing knowledge and to bring about a significant change in the scientific discourse. Art writers, like painters, create their texts in the shadow of acclaimed predecessors and masters of the genre, who provide representational models for their successors, but in doing so impose a dependence on their influence as well. Carrier took this direction for

adapting Gombrich's theory in terms of Bloom's theses, following Bryson's example. From such a diagnosis of the reasons for the actual coexistence of different but equally valid interpretative positions in contemporary art history, Carrier expressed a radical demand to move away from humanistic illusion, and thus from the goal of an objective, inferential reconstruction of the true intentions and historical reasons explaining the resolution of painted works. He believed that the indiscernibility of objective truth in this area should be openly acknowledged as a factor that liberates scholars from any obligation towards it and allows art history to develop freely as an autonomous genre of writing, not reproductive but creative, dependent solely on its own rules. Within the rules of the genre, the possibilities of constructing various contextual interpretations of pictures, potentially infinite, are *de facto* limited only by the extent of the authors' creative invention. Just as modernist painting evolved through abandoning illusionism and recognizing the independence of the picture from what the external world really looks like, so should postmodern, "revisionist" and "anti-humanist" art history approve of its complete sovereignty over what intentions and reasons really determined the form of the works being explained. In turn, just as artistic modernism was based on the conscious exploitation of the potential of the medium itself and focused on purely painterly means of constructing the picture, so the task of anti-humanist art history is to make conscious use of the arsenal of purely rhetorical means in interpretive writing that serve to construct convincing explanations. As the aim of such writing is not to discover historical truth, it remains only to produce further imaginative and suggestive interpretations that adhere to the rules of the genre and contribute to its development. It follows strictly from the need for persuasive effectiveness that they must fit in with the recognised rules of argument construction and coherently link the facts indicated on the picture side with the relevant contextual facts. Carrier's narrativist methodology affirmed the plurality of mutually contradictory yet equally legitimate interpretations as not only being a necessary but also a desirable state of affairs.

Chapter Six contrasts the alternative, hermeneutic trend in interpreting works of art with the attempts in the field of art history to seek out an effective method for the causal explanation of paintings, taking as its starting point the parallelism constructed by Dilthey between the humanities and natural sciences. This trend was represented by research concepts which focused directly on the question of the comprehensibility of the visual structure of paintings and linked it to the essential properties of the medium of painting and to the natural cognitive predispositions of vision. Hermeneutic analyses have shown that the construction of works of art is causally conditioned not so much by historical dependencies, an individual intention or source contexts as by permanent and timeless determinants that have primacy over them, which at the same time have the most direct impact both on the creative process and on the process of viewing. These factors are determined, on the one hand, by the fact that the picture is permanently sealed in a particular plane and presents itself in relation to it and, on the other, by the fact that the basic principles of visual perception do not change. These factors also ensure the timeless communicability of any picture which refers to them in its construction and is perceived in

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that reference. The picture thus remains intelligible irrespective of any knowledge or ignorance of contextual factors or of the artist's intention concealed behind it, because it presents itself within its own boundaries as an autonomous and innately meaningful visual structure. It presents to the viewer its role as the place where the visibility of motifs and their relations is produced, on the terms dictated by the location in the pictorial field encompassing all the components of the composition, so that they appear in established mutual relations, together, simultaneously and interdependently.

The divergence of the explanatory direction of art history and the hermeneutic direction of picture interpretation stemmed from a different understanding of the structural relation of expression that Dilthey ascribed to works of art, which occurs between their outer, expressing side and their inner, expressed side. In his theory of iconology, Panofsky interpreted the relationship of the exterior to the interior on the basis of opposition and derived from it the division between form and meaning of an artwork as being separate and opposing spheres: meaning underlies form, just as cause underlies effect. The hermeneutics of a painting, on the other hand, is based on the idea of the structural connectivity of these external and internal sides: structure is the fusion of the multiplicity of its components into a superordinating whole and a unity of intelligible meaning. This model of structural relationships was adopted in *Gestalt* psychology, which, together with Dilthey's hermeneutics, became the basis of Hans Sedlmayr's project of a "rigorous science of art" and analytical method. Concurrently, Rudolf Arnheim developed his own version of Gestalt theory and linked it to the question of the intelligibility of works of art. This theory, which was formulated counter to the assumptions of iconology and to the views of Gombrich, definitively abolished the dualism of the external, sensual side and the internal, mental side, binding the meaning of the picture entirely and exclusively to its visual form. In his book *Art and Visual Perception* (1954), Arnheim set out some basic laws governing how the structure of paintings is perceived, and then explained what perceptual, and consequently, expressive and meaningful effects result from these laws in relation to example paintings. Sedlmayr's and Arnheim's analytical methods were characterised by a clear objectivist and scientistic trait.

In his book *Truth and Method* (1960), Hans-Georg Gadamer conducted a fundamental critique of how the assumptions of objectivity and the methodical model of science were transferred to the field of hermeneutics. It showed understanding as a process that occurs independently of scientific consciousness, is concealed and superseded by its methodological theses, and yet at the same time undermines these theses, instead revealing itself in hermeneutical experience, intrinsically completely different from experience in the sense that experimental science has given to this concept. Gadamer's critical methodology highlighted that which cannot be eliminated from interpretation, contrary to the assumptions of historism and objectivity in the humanities, and which at the same time by necessity conditions every interpretation. The basic truth concealed by the methodological model of science in the humanities is the timeless and ever-present intelligibility of works of art, which is rooted in their own directly presented expression. However, at the same time, the objectivist model of

hermeneutics, which is oriented towards a definitive reading of the expressive meaning of a structure, concealed and dislodged from scientific consciousness the truth about the historical location of the conscious, understanding individual. Against this, Gadamer directed a dynamic view of tradition, whose image is constantly changing, and along with it, the constantly diversifying way in which the individual works of art that constitute its messages are presented, depending on the perspective determined by the situation of the subject. Because of the factor of "effective history" and the fact that the interpreter is situated in its sequence, each interpretation of the message of tradition must be unlike previous interpretations; it must be different, individual and update it. Gadamer's critique referred primarily to the methods of historical cognition, and especially to the acceptance of art as the object of this cognition, and for this reason no other scientific discipline was so much and so directly affected by this critique as art history. In relation to the assumptions of historism, objectivism and intentionalism, on which the attempts to establish the historical sense of works of painting were based, the philosopher's position was subversive in its nature.

Gombrich's reliance on the theses of Hirsch's methodical hermeneutics denoted his opposition to Gadamer's hermeneutics, which Hirsch's *Validity in Interpretation* directly and entirely opposed. Later references to *Truth and Method* in art history were selective in their nature, and constituted attempts to adapt them within the model of historical science that the philosopher rejected. Bätschmann deemed Gadamer's contraposition of truth and method overly "destructive", literally restating Paul Ricoeur's opinion on the opposition between understanding as the proper path in the humanities and explanation as the method of the natural sciences. Ricoeur, on the other hand, in denying this opposition, relied on Hirsch's methodology of validation hermeneutics, which was intended to ensure the possibility of establishing the meaning of literary works according to the rigours of objectivity set out by Popper.

In his theory of the presentation of a work of art, Kemp referred directly to Gadamer's ideas on the subject, which develop the idea of play as a partner collaboration, where the way a work of art presents itself to the viewer correlates with the viewer's situation in the process of its reception. Gadamer sees the play of presentation and reception of a work of art as uniting both sides in one process, eliminating the separateness of the partners, as a result of which the work of art presented such a view of itself as it was seen from the perspective of the viewer, and at the same time the work itself was truly present in this view. On the other hand, by means of methodical analysis, Kemp attempted to demarcate what each side introduces into the play, each in its own form of participation. The aesthetic-receptive method focused on the internal presentational system of the picture, which is understood as an immanent and objectively attainable quality of the work itself. In the optics of this method, the picture was to reveal itself to the investigative, distanced gaze in a way that Gadamer claimed it never actually does, namely in a manner detached from the viewer's participation, revealing the factors of its own self-presentation abstracted from any randomness of the viewing experience. Paradoxically, Kemp referred to the theses outlined in *Truth and Method* in order to take the road towards method and historical objectivity, that is, the road of an approach to a work of art which the

philosopher warned was an epistemological illusion and precluded the work from presenting itself truthfully.

While it seemed to Kemp that his method offers an objective insight into the internal system of image presentation, Max Imdahl's description of the nature of this system and how it works differed substantially. Imdahl argued that the specifically pictorial, or iconic, dimension of a work of art is created by a visual form whose rigorous organisation engages the viewer and does not so much represent the motifs by referring them outside of themselves as present them internally, constructing them on their own terms as entities that are inseparable from it and transformed by it in relation to the ordinariness of external and otherwise known realities. The system of pictorial presentation is based on a precisely determined order of composing motifs on the plane, which by virtue of internal logic creates a visual syntax, whose necessary and objective result is the specific semantics of the picture. The viewer's participation came down to seeing and reading what the form itself presented and expressed. By shifting the significance of the work to the immanent and objectively determined properties of its structure, Imdahl's project distanced itself from the assumptions of Gadamer's hermeneutics, at the same time linking it to the theory of structural signification in Ricoeur's hermeneutics. However, apparent inclination towards objectivity of this creator of "the iconic" is more directly explained by his open dialogue with Sedlmayr's concept of a "rigorous science of art". Referring to it, Imdahl presented the method of iconic analysis as a type of correction and improved modification of Sedlmayr's method of structural analysis.

Michael Brötje was radically opposed to a scientific art history that made the painting the object of its knowledge and which tried to explain the work in relation to its distant historical background. He accused such a research orientation of complete inadequacy with relation to the way in which the picture exists and presents itself in close relation to the sole and unsurpassable causal substrate that is its own medium: the pictorial plane. Brötje countered the false cognitive perspective of art history with his project of an "existential-hermeneutic science of art", which focuses on what is revealed in the unalterably current and intuitively understood presentation of a picture, and which consists in the universal human experience of history and transience. Brötje placed the process of a "fusion of horizons" in a dimension transcendent to everything historical on the part of both the work and the viewer. Referring to Gadamer's metaphor of the impassable historicity of understanding, Brötje transformed it into a model of hermeneutics that completely abolished the temporal distance between picture and viewer, and along with it the perspective of effective history.

The position closest to Gadamer's is Gottfried Boehm's own project of the hermeneutics of the picture. However, this proximity is limited only to the extent to which "an increase in being" manifests itself in the pictorial presentation, and in this way precipitates the indistinguishability of what can be seen from the sensual presentation of the art work itself. Boehm emphasised the permanently processual dimension of the visual presentation, which cannot be reduced to the established state of affairs and corresponding statements of fact. As a consequence, it is impos-

sible to move on from fact to explanation. The process of a visual increase in being is of a meaningful nature, and can therefore be considered as falling within the scope of hermeneutics. As a consequence, it also requires interpretation in a linguistic form. However, this interpretation must first and foremost take account of the distinctiveness and specificity of the visual language of the picture. Thus, as Boehm argued, the hermeneutical enterprise should focus on the problems of the relationship between these languages, i.e. it should concern the translation of meaning from one language to another. It is in the interpretation of the sense of the pictorial presentation that the picture actualises itself each time anew, which corresponds to Gadamer's idea of the historic nature of understanding. According to Boehm, the picture lends itself to visual experience in an essentially unchanging way, grounded in the permanent physiology and psychology of visual experience, and it is only the translation of this experience into the language of the interpreter's concepts that is the actualising factor, linking the picture to the historically changing horizon of reception. Focused primarily on the question of the identity of the artwork, Boehm's hermeneutics leaves the issue of its effective history far to the side. The same also generally applies to the reception of Gadamer's propositions within the art history community, including those art historians who did in fact share the principles of his hermeneutics. Gadamer's position did not manage to break the objectivist model of an approach to an artwork as an object of scientific analysis, just as, on the other hand, it proved resistant to Gombrich's radical theses regarding the variability of vision and the dependence of perception results on the assumptions projected onto a picture.

In this context, the theme of a constant variability of perspectives from which paintings present themselves depending on the researchers' current angle on tradition found an interesting further development in Mieke Bal's theoretical discussion, which provides a critical approach to views on the scientific paradigm in art history. Her position is presented in the conclusion of the book. Although Bal does not follow the hermeneutics of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* and takes Charles S. Peirce's semiotics and post-structuralism as a starting point, she still rejects the objectivist model of analysing a work of art from a historical distance. The key concept determining her approach is the narratological notion of focalisation, which describes the dependence of the way something appears to be as determined by its viewer's position. Bal pointed to the significance of the focalisation factor in scientific texts, which manifests itself in the way the object of analysis is presented, despite the researcher's efforts to hide their own situational perspective behind the distanced, objectified, impartial and neutral language of a third-person narrative. The fact that the linguistic representation of the object of scientific analysis is inseparable from the position of the author/agent of narrative account results in a situation where any kind of statement aspiring to be objective and abstracted from the subjective point of view in fact bears features of free indirect focalisation and free indirect speech that comes with it. Attempts at concealing the researcher's subjective contribution to the construction of a picture of the object of their analysis are considered by Bal to be the factor falsifying scientific discourse of humanities in general, and of art history in particular.

Bal brought out the dimension of the narrator's responsibility through relating the concept of focalization to the notion of "the gaze" in Jacques Lacan's theory and the notion of "framing" in Jonathan Culler's theory. She argued that the object of a research analysis presents itself to its interpreter through the lens determined by a particular cultural frame. However, the researcher, placing themselves within this framework, independently chooses a certain point of view that is feasible under existing conditions. Consequently, Bal maintained that the epistemology of scientific art history falsely invalidates the historical positioning of the researcher in their contemporary conditions and posits an impartial insight into the past and a view of pictures as if "from nowhere". She contrasted this approach with describing the effects of one's own visual experience, adopting a narrative optic that is overtly rooted in the contemporary, but at the same time subjective, personal, and aware of the historical position of the researcher looking at the picture. Apart from pointing to the errors of objectivism, historism and intentionalism, Bal also reproached scientific art history for its fundamental flaw of reducing paintings to the texts and theories projected onto them. This iconological model of reduction was taken further in the form of subordinating paintings to the discourses about them, to the pre-defined theories that are applied to them as ready-made codes and keys to their interpretation. The only difference is that contemporary theoretical concepts are projected onto the painting, rather than its presumed literary sources. However, the crux of the problem remains the same, i.e. a visual work of art is subjected to instrumental conceptualisation when it is assigned the subordinate function of illustrating, confirming or resonating the content suggested by a particular related text, or a selected theory, some ready-made system of concepts or propositions, or any kind of analytical and interpretative matrix. The actual result of applying various theories as tools of analysis to read the meaning of a picture is its illustrative objectification, i.e. the analysis subjects the picture to the dictates of theoretical discourse.

Bal provided a pertinent diagnosis of the typical phenomenon of contemporary art history discourse, that is, harnessing paintings for an ever-growing variety of "theoretical perspectives" that predetermine interpretative hypotheses and analytical optics, i.e. the predefined conceptual framework of focalisation and the reading of visual works. This particular trend had been described earlier by David Carrier, who explained it in terms of his narrativist methodology, i.e. art historians reach for fresh theoretical narratives in order to interpret paintings from a different angle and in this way multiply alternative readings of art works. What motivates them is their fear of being influenced by the former readings provided by their predecessors and the need to develop a scientific discourse of their discipline. Narrativism justifies and provides affirmation to the process of constant multiplication of theoretical perspectives that are projected onto the paintings. The direction of the narratology of paintings proposed by Bal is in fact just the opposite. She counterposed the practice of subordinating visual art works to predefined theories with an analysis rooted in the work's semiotic power, which can only be experienced by means of a deeply engaging and careful observation coupled with analytical reading (*close reading*). The analyst allows the art work to speak for itself, endows it with its own voice in

the process of transferring their own visual experience into a written form. What emerges as a result is a joint narrative of the two parties in what can be called free indirect speech. Bal's narratology identifies the same key issue, i.e. the translation of the particularities of the visual language of the painting into the words of its interpreter in a similar way to Boehm's hermeneutics of the picture. Bal also emphasises the irreplaceability of the visual experience and rejects the possibility of a translation that would be its adequate representation. What further connects Boehm and Bal's views is their emphasis on the indicative, deictic function of the transformative, essentially metaphorical and always authorial explanation of an image: both authors concur that it should direct attention towards the work itself. What distinguishes Bal's approach, however, is her claim of the pictures' changeability, as they are always subjected to focalised viewing by their interpreter, who brings in the perspective of their own personal and cultural experiences. The latter reflect the horizon of the contemporary and include accumulated memory and current viewing conventions. Incorporating the important factors of the historical conditioning of the viewer as the factors determining the way the work of art is seen distances Bal's narratology from Boehm's hermeneutic position, which, on the other hand, brings it closer to Gadamer's hermeneutics.

Carrier's narrativism and Bal's narratology outline two very different conclusions that critically summarise a paradigm of historical explanation of painted works that is based on normative methodology, rooted in the principles of scientific objectivity and the logic of inference, which would ensure the detection of the true causal sources of paintings. Even though this methodical, objectivist, explanatory and "restuitive" model of art history has been completely discredited from both sides, at the same time it did give rise to alternative perspectives of understanding the relevance of contemporary art writing that interprets old paintings. Carrier sees this both as a means towards art history's own interest as a scientific discipline whose further development necessarily required continuous production and innovation as part of its interpretative discourse and also in the professional self-interest of individual researchers, who have to compete for their position by fending off the influence of their predecessors. Bal, on the other hand, points to a different perspective, whose reference point is the identity of the object and the agent of the interpretative narration. She defines the scope of the narrative on a particular painting as being determined by ethical categories, i.e. as the scope of responsibility of each individual researcher for their own relation towards the object of the analysis and for his or her own words, which not only define this object but also bear witness to the adopted way of seeing and situate the analysis between an attitude of being open to the semiotic power of a work of art and, on the one hand, submission to the rules of the discursive system established from outside – the kind of submission that would corroborate Lacan's theory of the power of "the gaze".